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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, October 12, 2007

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Baby out of hospital

Friday, October 12, 2007

Staff report%%par%%

A 3-month-old baby who was allegedly beaten and raped by her father was released Thursday from the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor.

Child Protective Services placed the girl in a foster home, Blackman Township Public Safety Deputy Director Jon Johnston said today.

Kirk Coleman, 27, is charged with first-degree criminal sexual conduct and first-degree child abuse and is free on a \$100,000 bond.

Coleman's attorneys are seeking a mental examination for him.

The baby's mother took her to Foote Hospital on Sept. 14 with a variety of injuries. Investigators said she was unconscious and initially placed on a ventilator with head injuries, 11 broken ribs, fractures to her legs and broken eye sockets.

Johnston said the girl has made ``good progress" and receives daily medical care.

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Musselman 'not guilty by reason of insanity'

By Matt Whetstone, Cadillac News

LAKE CITY — Frank Musselman found himself on Old Mission Peninsula Thursday morning.

When he thinks about his daughter, Alyssa, he drives. Over the last week, he's thought about her a lot.

By 1 p.m., Frank found his way back to Lake City. He managed to stay through half of Missaukee County Prosecutor Bill Donnelly's closing arguments in the murder trial against his ex-wife, Amy Sue Musselman.

When he left, he didn't come back until after 28th Circuit Court Judge Bill Fagerman deemed Amy Musselman not guilty by reason of insanity. Amy Musselman was charged with murdering the former couple's 7-year-old daughter, Alyssa Paige Musselman, on Sept. 13, 2006.

"It's so overwhelming the fact that Alyssa's dead and gone," Frank Musselman said. "The rest of the things that go on in life don't seem like a big deal anymore.

"I just feel like nobody's won," he said. "Nobody can win because Alyssa's dead."

Although Frank knew his now ex-wife had been struggling mentally, he never thought those issues would claim the life of his daughter.

As a father, he said his No. 1 duty was to protect and take care of his children. He plans to renew his focus on his 4-year-old son.

"You're a hero in (your children's) eyes," he said.

He said there have been many sleepless nights and he expects many more.

Amy Musselman's sisters, Andrea Manchip and Michelle Geiger, said there's no good verdict in this case.

"This is all we could hope for because now she is in the place where she will get some help," Geiger said.

The process takes a "very long time," Geiger said. "She's going to be there for a long time."

Following closing arguments, Fagerman took a 20-minute recess before issuing his ruling. He said while the evidence clearly shows Amy Musselman shot and killed her daughter, the evidence of Amy's insanity at the time of the murder overwhelmed the other evidence.

Fagerman ruled Wednesday that Amy Musselman was responsible for the death of Alyssa in a premeditated, first-degree fashion and used a firearm to commit that offense. That information will be included in his report to a downstate forensic center where Amy Musselman will be housed while physicians conduct an evaluation on her condition.

The center has 60 days to complete the report. Donnelly can then petition Missaukee County Probate Court to have her involuntarily placed in the center. Fagerman said the underlying offense will help determine how long she'll remain at the forensic center.

"I did my job, (defense attorney) Bill Barnett did his job and the judge did his job," Donnelly said after the verdict. "The law is there to protect society and protect individual rights."

Barnett said he believes the court reached the appropriate verdict based on the evidence presented.

"All the medical testimony was very consistent and it all led the court to reach a not guilty by reason of insanity verdict," Barnett said. "This is a terrible and horrible tragedy that can never be adequately resolved or understood by any court or community."

Fagerman spoke extensively about medical evaluations conducted on Amy Musselman as recent as Sept. 13, 2007. He also said the fact that she was not declared competent to stand trial until May 2007 was a deciding factor.

The findings from three different psychologists were the same: Amy Musselman was legally insane on the day she killed Alyssa.

By law, Amy Musselman was found legally insane because she “lacked the mental capacity to appreciate the nature and quality of her conduct” and “lacked the capacity to conform her conduct required by the law.”

One doctor’s report indicated that Amy Musselman was the most severely mentally ill person he had seen who wasn’t already hospitalized.

Another doctor’s report said Amy Musselman believed she was doing a service to her daughter by killing her to prevent her from being harmed by others.

“The forensic center is not quick to find someone legally insane,” Fagerman said.

Frank Musselman, who has spoken with Amy over the last year, said he hopes Amy gets the help she needs.

Your local connection

The verdict

Circuit Court Judge Bill Fagerman found Amy Sue Musselman not guilty by reason of insanity Thursday.

With that verdict, Musselman will be transported to a downstate forensic center. Fagerman will submit his ruling to the forensic center.

Musselman will be reviewed for 60 days and the center will submit a report back to the judge.

It’s likely that Missaukee County Prosecutor Bill Donnelly will file a petition in Missaukee County Probate Court to have Musselman involuntarily committed to the forensic center.

Defense attorney Bill Barnett said the petition will ask Probate Judge Charles Parsons to monitor Musselman and order her course of treatment.

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Published October 7, 2007

Local woman arraigned for kidnapping

By WILL WHELTON
Editor

WILLIAMSTON — Local police have made an arrest in a recent reported kidnapping attempt.

Kelli Roberts of Williamston was arraigned Sept. 28 in 55th District Court on two counts of kidnapping/child enticement.

The charges stem from an incident Sept. 7 in a Williamston neighborhood. According to Williamston Police Chief Mark Hetfield, two girls — a 5-year-old and a 6-year-old — were playing in their back yard on Middle Street when Roberts approached the children and enticed them to follow her home. Hetfield said the children's mother saw the youngsters following Roberts and was able to retrieve her children.

Roberts, 37, was arrested Sept. 28 and lodged in the Ingham County Jail — her bond was set at \$250,000.

Roberts could face up to life in prison for each of the kidnapping/child enticement charges. According to Linda Maloney, Ingham County assistant prosecutor, a number of factors will determine any possible jail time, specifically any prior record and any aggravating circumstances of the case itself.

"Everything is driven by the Michigan Sentencing Guidelines," said Maloney.

Roberts' pre-trial hearing is set for Tuesday, and her preliminary exam is set for Oct. 11. Her attorney could not be reached at press time.

Contact Will Whelton at wwhelton@gannett.com or (517) 541-2502.

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Abduction try causes alarm

FLINT TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, October 12, 2007

By Holly Klaft

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FLINT TWP. - Authorities are asking for the community's help in identifying a suspect in an attempted abduction Wednesday at Woodland Elementary School.

A man wearing all black approached a 7-year-old girl on the school's playground during a lunch break at about 12:20 p.m., according to Flint Township police.

Students on the playground became alarmed when they saw the man and started yelling for help, driving him away, Carman-Ainsworth School Superintendent Bill Haley said.

Witnesses told police the suspect was tall, wore a black ski mask and drove an old black van with a cracked windshield and cracked back window.

The district's Web site, www.carman.k12.mi.us, described the individual as a heavysset male about 5-foot-10.

"We're hoping to identify this person and ascertain why they were on our playground," Haley said.

Audrie Pelky, whose daughter, Ariel, is in second grade at the school, said she's hoping to find out more about the incident.

"If it was a random abduction (attempt), that would really bother me," said Pelky, 28, of Flint Township.

School officials have been updating parents through newsletters sent home Wednesday and Thursday and on the Web site, Haley said.

He said the district also has boosted the number of office staff to help field calls from concerned parents.

"It's very upsetting to the students," Haley said. "It's good the students reacted, but it's sad that they have to be educated about those kinds of things. You'd like to think schools are a safe place students can go to every day."

Anyone with information is asked to call Detective Sgt. Gene DuBuc or Detective James Santa at (810) 600-3250, or the Carman-Ainsworth School District at (810) 591-3700.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Panel discusses child safety with Howell parents

School board hires law firm to investigate assault incident

Friday, October 12, 2007

BY LISA CAROLIN

The Livingston Community News

Speakers at a child safety forum Tuesday night emphasized the importance of parents teaching their children about their bodies and sexuality so they will know when something is not appropriate.

The forum, attended by about 40 people, was scheduled after it was learned that two young boys, ages 9 and 11, had been charged with sexually assaulting a 7-year-old on a Howell school bus last May. How the incident was handled by school officials remains under investigation.

In the wake of that disclosure, many parents have expressed anger and concern that something like that could happen on a school bus. The session at Southeast Elementary School in Howell was titled "Keeping our children safe - Conversations between parent and child."

Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse explained how a case like the bus assault was investigated and how it is key to differentiate between experimental behavior and predatory behavior.

"When I become professionally involved in a case, it's at the end when kids are acting inappropriately or illegally, and everything else has failed," said Morse.

Carolyn Arking, a child psychologist spoke about what's appropriate to tell a child about sex and at what age.

"Sexual curiosity starts when a child is 3 or 4," said Arking. "You want your child to see you as their source for information about their body and sexuality. You want them to be able to identify when things are not right and to understand the difference between good and bad touch."

Arking recommended using accurate anatomical language when explaining body parts to children.

Mary Beno, a health education consultant with the Livingston Educational Service Agency, spoke about what is being taught about personal safety and sex education in public schools.

"The Howell Public Schools have a sex advisory committee that recommends what is taught at each grade level," said Beno. "The district will soon start teaching personal safety beginning in grades first through third and talking about such things as safe versus unsafe versus unwanted touch."

The curriculum, she said, will include teaching children not to keep secrets about touching, that it is never too late to tell someone about touching that breaks the rules and that when older or bigger children try to break the touching rule, it is important to ask for help.

One mother asked if teaching children such things might be putting ideas in their heads. Arking responded that by educating children it normalizes things and makes it feel safe for them.

Another parent asked if school districts send home letters about what's being taught on sex education in schools. Beno said that all school districts must send home a letter about the content being taught and that parents can preview the material and can also request that their child opt out of it.

Meanwhile, the Howell Board of Education has retained the Thrun Law Firm to review district communications surrounding the sexual assault.

"We want to find out what happened," said board President Phil Westmoreland.

The attorneys were not given a time frame in which to return to the board with their findings. "We'll move as quickly as we can go," Westmoreland added. "This is important to us."

There has been confusion surrounding the situation. Howell school officials at one point said that they did not know that the incident was sexual in nature, but police reports show that not to be the case.

The district last month instituted a new policy requiring students riding the bus to shift toward the front of the bus as it empties.

News Staff Reporter Casey Hans contributed to this report.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Defendant's confession tells grim tale

Friday, October 12, 2007

BY LYNN TURNER

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KALAMAZOO -- Jurors Thursday heard a taped confession of an emotional-sounding Christopher Steven Holder admitting to fatally stabbing and choking his wife.

In the 35-minute recording, Holder, who is standing trial for the death of Anna Holder, 19, told police he killed her on March 29 in their Kalamazoo Township apartment and then tried to dispose of the evidence in two counties.

The two had been arguing before they returned to their South Kendall Avenue apartment, Holder told Kalamazoo Township Detective Larry Haynor in a taped statement made on March 31. At some point, Holder, 23, told his wife there were official papers she needed to see.

When Anna Holder tried to leave the apartment, Holder grabbed her shirt, dragged her into the bedroom and threw her on the bed, he said.

"I don't know what came over me," Holder said on the recording. "I put my hands around her neck.

"She was asking me to stop. I could see everything in her eyes -- the fear, the love. I didn't mean to kill her.

"I didn't mean to take the sword that she had bought me and stab her in the throat with it. I loved her, I told her."

But Holder was also frustrated with the estranged relationship they had, he said. Married in October 2005, Anna Holder had moved out of their apartment in mid-February. Holder said he "prayed against" his wife's talk of moving into her own apartment.

Family members of both the victim and defendant sobbed as the recording played, some of them leaving the courtroom.

Holder asked, and was granted permission, to not be in the courtroom as the recording played.

After choking and stabbing her, Holder said he put the nozzle of a fire extinguisher down her throat and turned it on.

"I wanted to make sure when I took (Anna's friend, who was waiting in the parking lot for her) home, she wouldn't be able to leave," Holder said on the recording.

He then took the body to Van Buren County, where he tried to burn it and other evidence. When that didn't work, he dumped the body in the 1800 block of East Michigan Avenue.

Forensic pathologist Dr. Brian Hunter testified that Anna Holder died of sharp-force injuries and asphyxiation. Either injury could have killed her, he said. Between 80 and 90 percent of her body was charred.

Holder told Haynor he dumped the sword, fire extinguisher and some other evidence into the Kalamazoo River. The items were never recovered.

"I want you to know none of this was premeditated or planned," Holder told Haynor on the recording.

Testimony is to continue Tuesday.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Shelter to host fundraiser in Grayling

Safe house serves women in four northern counties

Friday, October 12, 2007

By HELEN LOUNSBURY

TIMES WRITER

GRAYLING - For 21 years, a women's safe house serving four Northeast Michigan counties has operated quietly and unobtrusively.

But this weekend River House Inc. unveils its normally private endeavors - helping local women recover from abuse and homelessness - to the public. The Grayling-based River House serves Ogemaw, Roscommon, Oscoda and Crawford county women and families.

Planners hope that the shelter's Saturday-Sunday events spark broader awareness and support throughout its region.

"Our funding, like other state agencies, is getting whittled away," said Rhoda Hacker, River House director. "That's why we're doing this fundraiser. We want people to see the scope of what we do. We're doing probably

50 percent more than we were a decade ago with the same or less funding."

Specifically, River House serves 200 resident clients - women and their children - in its shelter each year. This week, the Grayling shelter's 24 beds are all full, Hacker said.

That's not all. The agency's Ogemaw, Oscoda and Roscommon county outreaches serve 400 more clients via counseling, education, legal advocacy and other programs.

River House's sexual violence program serves 100 clients, Hacker said. Its crisis line handled 600 crisis calls in the last year.

To do it all, River House runs on a

\$600,000 budget. Twelve full-time people, and a cadre of volunteers, cover 2,500 square miles in their four counties, agency planners say.

"We get a lot of community support already," Hacker said. "But gas, food and our other costs keep going up. Our funding doesn't. We have to involve more of our communities in what we do."

River House events open at 9 a.m. Saturday with an open house, breakfast and tour. That night, "The Event" features a 6-11 p.m. dinner and jazz theater. The keynote speaker is Debbie Banks, a River House graduate and queen for Roscommon's County's Tip-Up Town winter festival. Planners say Banks will reflect on the shelter and the counseling she received that helped her get back on her feet.

Sunday features a 1 p.m. "High Tea" with raffle, silent auction and presentations by state Rep. Joel Sheltrown, in Houghton Lake.

River House Inc. got its start in 1986 when Grayling Mercy Hospital and area human service agencies recognized a need among homeless and abused women.

Mercy Hospital responded by helping launch, then oversee River House for 17 years, Hacker said. Three years ago, the nonprofit separated, creating its own board of directors.

"We've got a lot of creative ways businesses and individuals can get involved," Hacker said. "We hope people come out. Homelessness and domestic violence continue to be a problem here. We need community backing to keep making an impact."

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Article published Oct 12, 2007
Want heat? Prepare to pay more
Robert Warner
The Enquirer

You could feel it in this week's howling winds, the ones that sent south-central Michigan tumbling like a dry leaf from a midsummer sweat into the first shivers of fall, headed straight for the icy chill of winter.

The sense of foreboding that accompanies the start of another heating season is weighing heavy on area residents.

If you heat with propane, the news is the worst, said Peter Woodruff, president of E.M. Sergeant Heating and Cooling: Prices have risen 30 percent since last year.

And heating oil customers are paying between \$2.50 and \$3 per gallon to fill their 275-gallon tanks, Woodruff said. That's up 57 cents per gallon from a year ago, the state said.

Meanwhile, there are some signs of hope: Long-term weather forecasts are for above-average temperatures this winter in Michigan, and natural gas customers are seeing prices close to or below last year's levels.

But then there's this: The Volunteer Center of Battle Creek's Kari Marciniak said it already appears the state's safety net for needy utility customers is going to be thinner this year.

Marciniak administers the Center's countywide 211 help line, which in September took 3,184 calls for help overall.

"I had 15 unmet requests for heating oil this past month and never had more than two before," Marciniak said.

She also received 285 calls for help with natural gas bills, of which she referred 148 for assistance. The other 137 requests went unmet, mostly for lack of funds.

The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center foresees above-average temperatures throughout the winter for Michigan, with the greatest deviation toward warmer weather coming in the heart of the coldest months of the year — December, January and February. That's according to the latest seasonal outlooks, issued Sept. 20.

That forecast is based in part on the development of weak La Niña conditions in the Pacific Ocean in recent months, the weather service said in explaining its forecast.

While La Niña conditions are characterized by cooler-than-normal ocean temperatures, the weak La Niña can't overcome other factors that will keep the Great Lakes and much of the rest of the country warmer than usual this winter, forecasters said.

For October, both SEMCO Energy Gas Co.'s Battle Creek Division and Consumers Energy Co., suppliers of natural gas to most of the surrounding area, are charging rates that are 5 percent higher than the state average. But SEMCO spokesman Tim Lubbers noted the company's Battle Creek rate is lower than it was in October 2006.

The Michigan Public Service Commission reported Wednesday that the average price of home heating oil is up 20 percent from last year, while natural gas prices statewide are up just 2 percent from a year ago.

Home heating customers aren't without options when things get tough, Lubbers said.

"If people think they're going to struggle paying their gas bill this winter, call us early, before they get a bunch of shutoff notices," Lubbers said. "We'll put together a payment program, put them in touch with agencies that can help. It's way better for them to call us sooner rather than later."

Lubbers said SEMCO made a large donation to the local heating assistance effort last winter and supports The Heating and Warmth Fund, among other charitable moves by the company.

There's more help out there, too: weatherizing help for low-income folks through the Community Action Agency of South Central

Michigan; flat-rate payment plans offered by utilities, oil and propane providers; wintertime shutoff prevention for the poor and elderly; and state home heating credits and more.

"There is a lot you can do to reduce your overall costs," E.M. Sergeant's Woodruff said.

"The best thing you can do is attic insulation," Woodruff said. "Then, if you have single-pane windows, at least have storms on them."

Robert Warner can be reached at 966-0674 or rwarners@battlecreekenquirer.com.

Thursday, October 11, 2007



Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News

Salon owner Lynda MacNeil, who was homeless for nearly 10 years, donates countless hours to a Detroit agency that helped her escape homelessness.

Across Metro Detroit: Spotlight

Ex-homeless woman gives back

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

CLINTON TOWNSHIP -- Lynda MacNeil was sitting on a corner in the Cass Corridor more than 20 years ago when she hit the lowest of lows.

A homeless man offered her a drink of "canned-heat," which is made with jellied alcohol. Homeless herself for nearly 10 years, MacNeil asked herself what she had come to before she said a prayer.

"I know you're busy," MacNeil prayed, unable even to use the word "God" because she felt so unworthy. "When you are not busy with all these good

people, if you ever get a chance to help get me out of here, I will do whatever it is you want me to do. I don't need a house with a white picket fence. All I need is your help and I will do whatever you want me to do."

Today, MacNeil owns her own hair salon in Clinton Township and donates countless hours to Cass Community Social Services, the Detroit agency that helped her escape homelessness.

At the agency that reaches out to those who are most forgotten, MacNeil works on fundraisers, collects clothing donations in the community for the homeless, helps with programs geared at homeless mothers and serves on the agency's board of directors.

"She is serving as a tremendous role model for people who are still struggling with addiction," said the Rev. Faith Fowler, Cass' executive director. "She's terribly heroic. If we are looking for role models and heroes, I'd look to somebody like Lynda. She spends so much time helping other people."

MacNeil's long-term goal is to make enough money so she can open up a beauty school at Cass, to give other homeless people a ray of hope about their futures.

"Cass fed and clothed me when I was homeless. I want to give back. I told God if he helped me, I'd turn around and give what I could," she said.

MacNeil grew up in a middle class family in Harrison Township. She became homeless in her early 20s, shortly after her mother abruptly died of heart disease at the age of 41.

"I started drinking," MacNeil said. "I was pretty depressed."

Her drinking led to drugs and soon after she moved downtown into an apartment, closer to where she would buy drugs. Her money ran out and soon she was living on the streets in the Cass Corridor. She lost touch with her father, not wanting to involve him in her life.

She slept in abandoned hotels or wherever she could find a place to sleep. She was robbed, raped and saw things she'd rather forget.

Cass offered food, shelter and clothes to the homeless, but MacNeil would stand across the street and tell her homeless girlfriend what kind of clothes to bring back for her.

"I never wanted to face homelessness," MacNeil said. "I was scared and thought it would be better to sleep on the streets."

But seeing the pain in the eyes of the man who offered her a drink of "canned heat" gave her the strength to believe she could turn her life around.

In 1985, MacNeil went into a treatment program for drugs and alcohol and has been clean and sober ever since.

She put herself through beauty school, landed jobs in the field until working her way into owning her own business. She rebuilt bridges with her father and his new wife. She also met her husband, Craig MacNeil, while volunteering at Cass.

"Hers is such a miraculous story," said Rose Halatsis, manager of MacNeil's salon. "It is just incredible. What she went through and then to pull herself up out of the gutter is such an inspiration. I am very blessed to have her in my life."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or [*kkozlowski@detnews.com*](mailto:kkozlowski@detnews.com).

Looking for housing support

By Rick Charmoli, Cadillac News

Many things changed when the Spivey family moved into their new apartment four months ago.

The Spiveys had been looking for a place that was nice, affordable and one that could work with them instead of against them. They found that and more when they were able to take advantage of something called permanent supportive housing.

This type of housing has criteria for income like most subsidized housing but also has other requirements potential renters must meet. The complex is not considered low income or subsidized but is considered workforce housing.

At least one of the adults in the family must require permanent support which means the client must have a describable special need condition defined as a physical, mental or emotional impairment.

Northland Meadow Apartments started with eight permanent supportive units when it opened in May and since then has filled up four.

CADILLAC — The Spivey family has been afforded many firsts since moving into their new apartment four months ago.

Prior to living in their three-bedroom apartment at Northland Meadow, April Spivey said they had problems finding a place that was, in her words, not a dump. Various issues including credit problems and the fact that both her and her husband are on disabilities were a few of the factors leading to their housing dilemma. That was until they found the new apartment complex.

"I like living here and so does my husband. My counselor from mental health helped us get in here," she said.

Since moving in, the Spivey family now is comfortable and enjoying things they never had before such as a dishwasher, garbage disposal and central air. Their two children are able to sleep in their own private bedrooms instead of sharing one room and the family is looking to purchase a car for the first time in more than six years.

Things are going well.

The apartment the Spivey family is living in is one of eight permanent supportive housing units at the complex. Similar to supportive housing, the permanent supportive housing units have income criteria but potential clients must have a need for permanent support or have a special need condition. These special needs could include a physical, mental or emotional impairment.

"We have such a need for affordable housing which is different than this. We did show that we were lacking permanent supportive units," said Suzanne Gaffney, Northwest Michigan Human Services homeless prevention coordinator. "We were excited to get (the units) but it is such a fine line to get (clients) under the Area Medium Income yet have them make enough money to afford the rent and meet the other criteria."

Rebecca McGregor is the manager at the complex and of the eight units dedicated to the permanent supportive housing, she said four are currently filled with two more potential renters starting the screening process.

McGregor said she believes the units have not been filled as of yet simply because of the complicated criteria that potential renters must meet. That being said, she also knows that every day she and people at Northwest Michigan Human Service work with the criteria the easier it is to find people to fill the units.

"In the beginning, the qualifications were vague and it was a new program, but we are starting to get it figured out," she said. "We are more than half full. We just got our last two buildings opened in mid-September."

If anyone is interested in seeking more information about the permanent supportive housing units, contact Gaffney at 775-9781.



Bethany to celebrate 10 years of aiding refugees

Friday, October 12, 2007

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

The story is written on the face of Elia Ntacobakimvuna, 30, as he sits in his Grand Rapids apartment and tries to describe the small miracles of his new life.

"I am safe here," he says, his words translated from his native Kirundi. "No guns. I have a place to sleep and I am not hungry."

For the African refugee and his family of six, these are qualities of life one does not take for granted.

So it is with a thousand other refugees settled in the past 10 years by a Grand Rapids agency that is now part of Bethany Christian Services.

They have come from around the world, from Asia, from too many countries in Africa and even Cuba, in many cases fleeing circumstances many Americans could not imagine.

"Refugee resettlement is really about saving a life," said Jotham Ippel, resettlement supervisor for Programs Assisting Refugee Acculturation, a Grand Rapids agency that became part of Bethany in 2002.

"Many of them would not have survived otherwise."

With the Sept. 24 arrival at Gerald R. Ford International Airport of Ntacobakimvuna, his wife and their four children and Sebastiano Birukwishaka, his wife and their four children, it had settled at least 1,000 refugees.

They landed, as many do, as people without a country.

Both families came from a refugee camp in Tanzania, where their children were born and raised. They met before that, in a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where both Elia and Sebastiano were born and raised.

Neither man has set foot in their homeland, a small nation in central Africa that ranks as the poorest in the world.

It is scarred by a history of violence between the Hutu and Tutsi, marked by the 1972 genocide in which at least 100,000 Hutus are thought to have been killed. Nearly 500,000 fled the country.

That atrocity drove the parents of Ntacobakimvuna and Birukwishaka from Burundi.

Holly Chadwick, refugee outreach coordinator for Bethany Christian, spent six months in a Tanzanian refugee camp, helping to process this population for resettlement.

The children in these camps get an education, she said, but it is minimal.

"Everything is minimal. They live off rations. It's very much a holding pattern, waiting for something else.

"It's almost like purgatory."

For the most part, the refugees that have come to West Michigan in the past decade have managed to build at least the foundation for a new life. Most have jobs.

A small number has managed to graduate from college, including Nasije Krasniqi, 29, a refugee of Kosovo who arrived in West Michigan in 1999.

With the aid of a large church-based network of volunteers who help with everything from home repair to food shopping to tutoring, their transition has been easier.

"It is really a critical piece of our work. It's hard to resettle a family without a church being involved."

For Sebastiano Girukwishaka, 35, and his family, small things make a large difference. The food can still be an alien experience, like the time they stopped with volunteers for soft-serve ice cream. They threw it all out.

"We thank God that our children can go to school," said Girukwishaka, who never learned how to read.

Send e-mail to the author: troelofs@grpress.com

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(Photo by Courtesy of Hobbs+Black architects)
Along the river: Looking from the southwest, the new Michigan State Police headquarters will rise five stories along the Grand River in Lansing.

Security to buffer state police HQ

Site work to start in weeks on \$45M riverfront project

Jeremy W. Steele
Lansing State Journal

Security features will create a barrier between the new Michigan State Police headquarters and the rest of downtown Lansing.

But the project is key to helping the area grow, one of the site's developers said Thursday.

Site work is expected to begin in about eight weeks on the 148,000-square-foot office building at Grand Avenue and Kalamazoo Street, developer Gary Granger said. Major construction work is likely to begin after Jan. 1, 2008.

"It's going to add a lot of vitality to downtown," said Granger, who is partnering with developer Joel Ferguson on the so-called "Triangle Project," named after the shape of the riverfront parking lot where the headquarters will be built. The two will have until mid-2009 to finish the \$45 million project.

The latest design for the five-story building, which continues to be tweaked, features a limestone and brick look, although the building's shell will be made of cast concrete.

The tougher material is required to meet security standards for the state police.

Architects intend the look to be a throwback to the state police's current headquarters along Harrison Road in East Lansing, Granger said. That property will return to Michigan State University when the state vacates it.

The building will be constructed 50 feet from the street and be surrounded by berms and fences to block pedestrians and vehicles from getting too close.

But the project, along with a new headquarters for Accident Fund Insurance Co. of America in the idled Ottawa Power Station, is a key "bookend" of downtown and riverfront improvements, Granger said.

Accident Fund announced its \$182 million project Monday.

The state police building would bring up to 560 state workers downtown, which should provide a boost to nearby businesses and housing projects, Granger said.

Critics, however, have railed against the project as wasteful during tight times. It will cost \$45 million for Granger and Ferguson to build and equip the building, which the state will lease for \$3.7 million a year. The state will have an option to buy the building for \$1 after the 25-year lease is up.

And city officials increasingly have pushed for a mix of offices, housing and retail space for the long-overlooked riverfront - not state offices.

Financially, it would be difficult to put anything else at the site, Granger said. The state police project will not use any local or state tax incentives.

Officials say the project is one-third the size of a plan put forward in March 2002. Gone are plans for a helicopter pad, emergency operations center and trooper training center, which could be put with other state police operations at the State Secondary Complex, said Edward Woods III, spokesman for the Department of Management and Budget.

And the lease rate of \$24.90 per square foot is competitive, he said. Three years ago, the state leased 78,500 square feet of new downtown office space for \$23.18 per square foot for the Department of Community Health.

Granger said he is pursuing silver certification by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program.

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